The Secret Push That Could Ban TikTok

0:01

from The New York Times I'm Sabrina

0:03

tavernes and this is the

0:07

[Music]

0:11

daily American lawmakers have tried for

0:14

years to ban the video app Tik Tok over

0:17

concerns that it's ties to China pose a

0:19

national security risk last week they

0:23

passed a law that might finally do

0:26

it today my colleague subna maheswari on

0:31

the secret effort behind the law and

0:34

what a ban would mean for the company's

0:37

170 million American

0:40

[Music]

0:41

[Applause]

0:43

[Music]

0:47

users it's Tuesday April

0:50

[Music]

0:54

30th so sna tell me about this law that

0:57

just passed that potentially Bans the

1:00

social media app Tik Tok we've seen

1:02

efforts in the past to R in Tik Tok but

1:05

this one really seems like the most

1:07

substantial yet it's a huge deal what

1:10

this law really does is it puts the

1:12

future of this hugely popular app with

1:15

170 million American users into question

1:20

Tik Tok has reshaped the way many people

1:23

listen to music it's changed the way we

1:25

cook it's made a whole different kind of

1:28

celebrity but it's never never been able

1:30

to shake these concerns around the fact

1:32

that it has really close ties to China

1:35

it's owned by a Chinese company bite

1:37

dance and lawmakers for years have been

1:39

worried that the Chinese government

1:41

could somehow use bite dance and Tik Tok

1:44

to get information on Americans or

1:47

possibly spread

1:48

propaganda president Trump tried to ban

1:51

it in 2020 the state of Montana tried to

1:54

ban this app last year Tik toks largely

1:57

survived those challenges but this time

2:00

it could actually be banned in the

2:01

United States so let's talk about this

2:04

why did this effort succeed where the

2:07

other ones failed so it's an interesting

2:09

story here we go the committee will come

2:11

to order and it really dates back to

2:13

this hearing about a year ago that

2:16

Congress had with showu the CEO of Tik

2:19

Tok Mr Chu you are here because the

2:22

American people need the truth about the

2:24

threat Tick Tock poses to our national

2:26

and personal security so members of

2:30

committee thank you for your time Tik

2:31

Tok has repeatedly said that it has

2:34

addressed these National Security

2:36

concerns and that there's no issue here

2:39

and you can hear that when Shu testified

2:42

let me start by addressing a few

2:44

misconceptions about bite dance of which

2:46

we are a subsidiary bite dance is not

2:49

owned or controlled by the Chinese

2:51

government he's saying you American

2:53

investors are behind bite Dance Now Tik

2:55

Tok itself is not available in mainland

2:58

China where headqu reped in Los Angeles

3:01

and in Singapore and I myself am

3:03

Singaporean I live in Singapore the

3:06

bottom line is this American data stored

3:09

on American soil by an American company

3:12

overseen by American personnel and we

3:16

are actually going above and beyond what

3:18

American technology companies do to keep

3:21

things safe and I look forward to your

3:22

questions thank you very much and is

3:25

Congress convinced by that Congress is

3:27

not convinced by that bent is a Chinese

3:31

company well CH B Dan owns many

3:34

businesses that operates in China is it

3:36

or is it not a Chinese company uh

3:38

Congressman the way we look at it it was

3:40

founded by Chinese I'm not asking you

3:41

how you look at it fact is it a Chinese

3:43

company or not for example it was this

3:47

really fiery 5H hour hearing where

3:51

Republicans and Democrats asked really

3:54

contentious questions we do not promote

3:57

or remove content at the request of the

4:00

government

4:01

question the question is are you 100%

4:04

certain that they cannot use your

4:06

company to promote such messages it is

4:08

our commitment to this committee and all

4:10

our users that we will keep this free

4:12

from any manipulation by any government

4:14

if you can't say 100% certain I take

4:16

that as a no there's this underlying

4:19

sense of distrust around the company and

4:22

its ties to China search it I will

4:24

remind you that making false or

4:26

misleading statements to Congress is a

4:28

federal crime I understand

4:30

again if you go on a platform you will

4:31

find that content and it becomes clear

4:34

through the hearing that across the

4:36

board Republicans and Democrats largely

4:39

feel the same way uh Mr Chu I got I got

4:41

to hand it to you you've actually done

4:43

something that in the last three to four

4:45

years has not happened except for the

4:47

exception of maybe Vladimir Putin you

4:49

have unified Republicans and

4:53

Democrats so you know within weeks of

4:56

this hearing this small group of

4:58

lawmakers get together and they say

5:01

let's come up with a law that works

5:04

where all the other ones have failed and

5:07

actually make Tik Tok answer to its

5:10

Chinese connections once and for

5:14

[Music]

5:16

all so tell me about this small group of

5:18

lawmakers who are they so it starts with

5:21

Republicans among them is Steve scal one

5:24

of the most powerful Republicans in the

5:26

house and a small group sort of works

5:29

together for a few few months but they

5:31

realized that in order to really make

5:33

this law work they're going to need

5:35

Democrats so they end up working through

5:38

this house committee that's focused on

5:40

China and competition and this is where

5:43

the bulk of the work on this bill takes

5:46

place and just to note this is a really

5:49

small group there's less than 20 key

5:51

players who are working on this and all

5:54

throughout they are keeping this very

5:56

very secret and why exactly are they

5:58

keeping it secret what's the point of

6:00

that so this group really wanted to keep

6:02

this out of the eyes of Tik Tok which

6:05

has a huge lobbying presence in DC and

6:08

has successfully worked to kill bills

6:11

that targeted Tik Tok in the past and

6:13

what they're really doing is looking at

6:16

all of the past efforts to either force

6:18

a sale or a ban of Tik Tok and trying to

6:21

work their way through why those plans

6:24

didn't succeed and what they can do

6:26

differently but while the lawmakers are

6:29

working on this bill something big

6:31

happens that kind of changes the

6:33

politics around it and that's October

6:37

[Music]

6:38

7th your social media feat are unique to

6:41

you but could they be shaping how you

6:43

view the Israel Gaza wall the BBC's dis

6:46

as the war breaks out and people start

6:50

getting information about it a lot of

6:52

people are getting information about the

6:55

Israel Hamas war on Tik Tok especially

6:57

young people social media algorithm seem

7:00

to be driving some users towards

7:02

increasingly divisive posts and there's

7:04

this big messy argument spilling out

7:06

into living rooms and all over the

7:08

Internet and of course on Tik Tok and

7:10

it's getting very heated for instance

7:13

there's this moment in the fall where a

7:15

bunch of Tik Tok users start sharing

7:18

this old Manifesto I read Osama Bin

7:21

Laden's letter to America it's wild and

7:24

everyone should read it go read a letter

7:26

to America like seriously go read it

7:28

that was actually written written by

7:30

Osama Bin Laden defending the 911

7:33

attacks and criticizing the United

7:35

States support of Israel Tik Tok users

7:38

start trying to tie it to the modern day

7:41

conflict reading this letter it becomes

7:43

apparent to me that the actions of 9/11

7:47

were all just the buildup of our

7:48

government failing other nations and

7:51

this letter the way this letter is going

7:52

viral right now is giving me the

7:54

greatest sense of relief now it's all

7:56

coming to light because of Palestine and

7:58

there's the accusations that Tik Tok may

8:02

be promoting one side of the conflict

8:05

over the other and a couple of

8:07

researchers look at hashtags around

8:10

Palestine and they say that the data

8:12

they pulled shows that Tik Tok is

8:14

showing way more Pro Palestine videos

8:18

and not so much for Israel and this sets

8:20

off huge alarm bells for this small

8:22

group of

8:23

[Music]

8:25

[Applause]

8:28

lawmakers but isn't that just a function

8:30

of the fact that Tik Tok at this point

8:32

is the Public Square in the United

8:35

States for young people I mean this is

8:37

what young people were talking about and

8:38

this is where they're doing the talking

8:40

Tik Tok has pushed back really

8:42

forcefully against these accusations

8:44

they said that Gallup polls show that

8:47

young people view Israel differently

8:50

than older Generations they say that

8:53

they're not the ones influencing what

8:55

people post that the hashtags and the

8:57

videos are a reflection of the user base

9:00

and nothing that they're doing to

9:01

influence but for lawmakers this doesn't

9:04

really make their concerns go away

9:06

instead this conflict shows them how Tik

9:09

Tok could be used to spread propaganda

9:12

it made lawmakers feel that you know Tik

9:14

Tok could be really dangerous when it

9:16

comes to shaping the views of Americans

9:19

on foreign policy on us elections and

9:24

what it also does it provides this

9:25

driving force to this group that's

9:27

drafting this bill and they suddenly see

9:30

that you know this might be a way to

9:32

bring more people into their effort and

9:35

so heading into November against this

9:37

backdrop they even bring in the White

9:39

House and the justice department to help

9:41

work on this bill and with the White

9:44

House you know they want to make sure

9:45

that this is a bill that the president

9:47

will support and they work with the

9:49

justice department to shore up the

9:51

language in the bill to help defend

9:53

against Court challenges because the

9:55

justice department of course would be

9:56

the one that would have to defend the

9:58

bill right that's EX exactly right and

10:00

so they're trying to make it as rock

10:02

solid as possible so that they can win

10:04

in court when Tik Tok challenges this

10:06

law and so March rolls around and they

10:09

decide that it's time to unveil this

10:11

bill that they've been working on for

10:13

close to a

10:14

year the battle over Tik tock on Capitol

10:17

Hill is intensifying this morning house

10:19

lawmakers have agreed unanimously to

10:22

move a bill to a full floor vote and Tik

10:24

Tok is caught completely flat-footed

10:28

they didn't see this coming and this is

10:29

just what the group wanted so Tik Tok

10:33

has this Army of lobbyists that's

10:35

suddenly scrambling and they go into

10:37

damage control mode they start reaching

10:40

out to members of Congress this app is

10:43

so much more than just an app for dumb

10:45

Tik Tock dances they fly a group of Tik

10:48

Tock stars and small businesses to come

10:52

to DC a lifechanging app and Lobby on

10:55

the steps of the capital and meet with

10:56

lawmakers standing up here with all

10:59

these amazing Tik tokers behind me is a

11:01

complete honor and every single one of

11:02

them would voice their opinion just like

11:04

this this is how we feel this has to

11:06

stop they set up interviews between

11:09

these you know Tik Tok creators as

11:10

they're known and big TV shows and news

11:14

programs and they're doing everything

11:16

they can to fight against this bill

11:18

before it goes any further and then they

11:21

decide to do something

11:22

unusual which is use Tik Tok itself to

11:26

try and derail this bill how exactly did

11:29

they do that so days after this bill is

11:31

announced a ton of Tik Tok users get a

11:34

message when they open the Tik Tok app

11:36

that basically says call Congress and

11:39

tell them not to ban Tik Tok okay so

11:43

like literally this window comes up and

11:44

says call Congress here you go exactly

11:47

you can enter your zip code and there's

11:49

a button that appears and you can press

11:51

it and the call goes straight to your

11:53

representative oh wow so offices are

11:56

quickly overwhelmed by calls and Tik Tok

11:59

sent out this message to users on the

12:01

same day that a house committee is going

12:03

in to vote on this bill and whether to

12:06

move it forward and so the stunt happens

12:09

they go into vote and they come out and

12:11

it's 50 to zero in support of the Bill H

12:14

one of the representatives who worked on

12:16

the bill said that this Stunt by Tik Tok

12:19

turned a lot of NOS into yeses and yeses

12:21

into quote hell yeses so the whole

12:25

episode sounds like it actually

12:26

backfired right like Tik Tok stun

12:29

essentially just confirmed what was the

12:32

deepest fears of lawmakers about this

12:35

company that the app could be used to

12:37

influence American politics that's

12:39

definitely how a lot of lawmakers viewed

12:43

it and when this bill is brought to the

12:45

Full House a week later it passes by an

12:48

overwhelming majority and weeks later it

12:51

passes in the Senate as part of a

12:53

broader Aid package and on Wednesday

12:55

it's signed into law by President Biden

13:01

but now the question is what does it

13:03

mean like how will this actually work

13:06

and how will it affect the tens of

13:07

millions of Americans who use Tik Tok

13:10

every

13:14

[Music]

13:20

day we'll be right

13:25

back so subna now that Biden has signed

13:28

this Bill what does it actually mean in

13:32

practice for Tik Tok What does the law

13:34

do so the law is really trying to push

13:37

bite dance the company that owns Tik Tok

13:40

to sell to a non-chinese

13:43

owner and the company basically has nine

13:46

months for this sale to happen there's

13:48

an option for President Biden to add

13:50

another three months to that clock and

13:54

if the company doesn't find a buyer or

13:56

refuses to be sold it will be banned

14:00

and what would a ban actually mean sub I

14:03

mean people would still have the app on

14:05

their phones right so it wouldn't like

14:06

disappear overnight yeah no one's coming

14:08

to pick up your phone and to forcibly

14:10

delete this thing uh what the law says

14:13

is that app stores and web hosting

14:15

Services wouldn't be allowed to carry

14:17

Tik Tok anymore so basically it would

14:20

kind of die a slow death over time where

14:22

it wouldn't be updated and just kind of

14:24

Peter out so the bottom line here is

14:27

that the clock has started on this

14:29

potential sale right they have 12 months

14:31

to find a buyer so what are the

14:34

obstacles here I mean it sounds pretty

14:36

ferociously complicated there's a ton of

14:38

challenges here and it's a very messy

14:41

Choose Your Own

14:43

Adventure so one of the first big

14:45

questions is who could buy this right

14:48

bite dance and Tik Tok are private we

14:50

don't know their financials but analysts

14:53

estimate that it will cost tens of

14:55

billions of dollars that narrows the

14:57

buying pool pretty quickly and a lot of

14:59

the companies that could afford to buy

15:01

it like meta the owner of Facebook or

15:04

Google which owns YouTube would probably

15:06

be you know kicked out of the sort of

15:09

running because they are simply too big

15:12

uh Regulators would say you know you

15:13

already own these big apps you can't

15:15

possibly add this to your stable there'd

15:16

be a monopoly concern there exactly and

15:20

then there's a lot of questions around

15:22

how this would work technically bite

15:24

dance and Tik Tok are very much Global

15:26

organizations you have the CEO in

15:28

Singapore they have huge operations in

15:30

Ireland they have this big Workforce in

15:32

the US and of course they do have

15:35

engineers in China so how do you you

15:37

know extract all those things make it

15:39

all work it's a very big International

15:41

transaction right and then there is the

15:45

chance that the Chinese government

15:47

blocks this sale and says you cannot do

15:50

this bite dance we will not allow it so

15:54

sna how does that actually work though

15:55

in terms of China I mean can China

15:58

actually just ban the sale of this

16:01

company I mean it is a private company

16:02

after all right well here's one way it

16:05

could work the Chinese government could

16:07

block the export of Tik tok's algorithm

16:10

and let me explain that in kind of plain

16:13

English please they could basically

16:15

block the technology that fuels The

16:18

Tick-Tock of this app the

16:19

recommendations the magic of it why you

16:22

see what you see when you're looking at

16:24

Tik Tok Tik Tock is that an adjective

16:27

that is now an adjective

16:29

and there's a chance that vent could say

16:31

hey you can't export this technology

16:34

that is proprietary and if that happens

16:36

that suddenly makes Tik Tok way way less

16:39

valuable so the Chinese government could

16:42

let the sale go through potentially but

16:45

as a kind of an empty shell right the

16:47

thing that makes Tik Tok Tik Tok the

16:49

algorithm wouldn't be part of the

16:51

company so that probably isn't very

16:53

appealing for a potential buyer exactly

16:57

and I mean the role of the Chinese

16:58

government here is really interesting

17:00

I've talked to experts who say well if

17:03

the Chinese government interferes to try

17:05

and block a sale of this app doesn't

17:07

that underscore and prove all the

17:10

concerns that have been expressed by

17:12

American lawmakers exctly if you're

17:13

worried about China being in control of

17:14

this thing well that just confirmed your

17:15

fears exactly and it's it's I mean it's

17:18

an interesting thing that bite dance and

17:19

Tik Tok have to Grapple with so bottom

17:22

line here selling Tik Tok is quite

17:24

complicated and perhaps not even

17:26

possible for these reasons that you're

17:27

giving right I mean not least of which

17:29

because the Chinese government might not

17:32

allow the algorithm to leave the country

17:34

and that's not something that the US

17:35

Congress has a lot of control over so is

17:38

this law fundamentally just a ban then

17:43

that's what Tik Tok is calling it right

17:45

after this bill was signed into law on

17:47

Wednesday make no mistake this is a ban

17:51

a ban on Tik Tok and a ban on you and

17:54

your voice Tik tok's CEO made a Tik Tok

17:57

What else that explain the company's

18:00

position because the freedom of

18:01

expression on Tik Tok reflects the same

18:04

American values that make the United

18:06

States a beacon of Freedom he actually

18:08

argued that Tik Tok reflects American

18:11

values Tik Tok gives everyday Americans

18:14

a powerful way to be seen and heard and

18:17

that's why so many people have made Tik

18:19

Tok part of their daily lives and he

18:22

said that this law infringes on the

18:24

First Amendment Free Speech rights of

18:27

Americans who love it who use it every

18:29

day the courts the facts and the

18:32

Constitution are on our side and we

18:34

expect to Prevail again so it's very

18:38

clear that Tik Tok plans to challenge

18:40

this law in court and the court fight to

18:43

follow will determine the fate of Tik

18:46

tok's future in the US so is that first

18:48

amendment argument that the Tik Tok CEO

18:50

is making here going to work nobody

18:53

wants to put money on that I mean the

18:55

company is really approaching this with

18:58

the idea that the First Amendment rights

19:00

of Americans are being infringed on but

19:03

if you remember the government has been

19:05

working on this law they've been

19:07

anticipating those challenges and they

19:09

can justify an infringing of First

19:11

Amendment rights in certain cases

19:13

including with National Security

19:15

concerns and so it'll be up to a judge

19:17

on whether those concerns pass muster

19:20

and justify this sale and even a

19:23

potential ban of Tik Tok got it so Tik

19:25

Tok will argue Free Speech First

19:27

Amendment and the government will

19:28

counter by saying look this is about

19:30

China this is about America's national

19:32

security interests that's right and the

19:34

legal experts that I've spoken with say

19:36

this is a really big and sticky area of

19:40

the law and it's a huge case and they

19:42

really think that this will go to the

19:43

Supreme Court regardless of who wins in

19:46

kind of the first round of

19:48

this so where does that leave the

19:51

millions of Americans who use Tik Tok

19:54

and many of them of course who earn a

19:55

living on the platform I mean it's

19:57

really uncertain what happens now with

19:59

the company and the clock has started

20:01

ticking when I've looked at Tik Tok and

20:04

looked at videos from users this is

20:07

about the impending Tik Tock

20:10

band and just triggered me so much makes

20:14

my blood boil and I have to get this out

20:15

there there's a lot of shock the most

20:18

success I've had has been here on Tik

20:21

Tok and now they're trying to take it

20:24

away this is so stupid and anger you

20:28

can't ban apps You Can't Ban things from

20:31

people people are confused word on the

20:34

street is that in the next 9 to 12

20:36

months Tik Tok could be banned and

20:38

they're also caught a bit off guard just

20:40

because there have been these years of

20:42

efforts to do something about Tik Tok

20:45

people on the app have been hearing

20:46

about a Tik Tok ban really since 2020

20:49

like the government can take away a

20:50

literal app on our phones and supposed

20:53

to believe we're free you know a few Tik

20:55

tokers have said you how can this be the

20:57

thing that the government is pushing

20:59

through so quickly can we stop funding a

21:01

genocide no can we get free covid tests

21:04

no can we stop killing the planet no can

21:08

we at least watch videos on an app of

21:10

people doing fun things and learn about

21:12

the world around us no so there's this

21:15

sense of distrust and disappointment for

21:18

many people who love this app we got rid

21:20

of Tik Tok you're welcome protecting you

21:23

from China you know that phone was made

21:25

in China

21:29

and I think there's also this question

21:32

too around what about Tik Tok makes it

21:34

so harmful even though it has

21:36

increasingly become a place for news

21:39

there's plenty of people who simply use

21:40

this app for entertainment and what

21:43

they're seeing out of Washington just

21:44

doesn't square with the reality they

21:46

experience when they pull out their

21:50

phones and I wonder subna I mean just

21:53

kind of you know stepping back for a

21:55

second let's say this on Tik Tok

21:59

succeeds if it goes through would

22:02

Americans be better off it depends who

22:05

you ask for the users who love Tik Tok

22:08

if it actually disappeared it would be

22:11

the government taking away a place where

22:13

maybe they make money where they get

22:15

their entertainment where they figure

22:16

out what to read or what to cook next to

22:19

free speech Advocates this would be

22:22

dystopian um unheard of for the

22:24

government to crack down on an app with

22:27

such wide usage by by

22:30

Americans but for the American political

22:32

class and the National Security

22:34

establishment this is a necessary move

22:37

one that was years in the making not

22:39

something that was just come up with on

22:41

the Fly and ultimately it all comes down

22:44

to

22:46

China and this idea that you can't have

22:49

a social media app like this a source of

22:52

news like this that is even at all at

22:54

risk of being influenced by the Chinese

22:57

government and our greatest

23:01

[Music]

23:06

adversaries subna thank you thank

23:12

you we'll be right

23:16

back here's what else you should know

23:19

today on Monday in its latest

23:22

high-profile Showdown with prop

23:24

Palestinian protesters Columbia

23:27

University gave students until 2:00 p.m.

23:30

to clear out from an encampment at the

23:32

center of Campus or face

23:36

suspension it appeared to be an effort

23:38

to remove the encampment without relying

23:41

on New York City Police whose removal of

23:44

a previous encampment there 2 weeks ago

23:47

inspired similar protests on campuses

23:49

across the country

23:52

free hi this is Sharon otterman

23:54

reporting for the New York

23:56

Times at 2m. dead line for protesters to

23:59

clear out of the encampment at the

24:01

Center of Columbia University has come

24:04

and gone and there's still quite a large

24:07

contingent inside the encampment but

24:10

Monday's warning seemed only to

24:12

Galvanize the Columbia protesters and

24:14

their supporters and hundreds of

24:16

students and others from around the

24:18

campus have come out to support them

24:20

they are currently walking around in a

24:22

picket around the encampment hundreds of

24:25

students standing four or five people

24:28

deep encircled the encampment in a show

24:30

of solidarity they were joined by

24:33

members of the Columbia faculty there's

24:35

also dozens of Faculty members who are

24:38

prepared to stand in lines in front of

24:43

the main entrance to the encampment in

24:45

case Public Safety or the NYPD move in

24:49

but as of two there was no sign of that

24:53

happening instead then on Monday evening

24:57

Colombia announced it had begun to

24:59

suspend students who had failed to leave

25:01

the encampment it was unclear exactly

25:04

how many students had been

25:06

[Music]

25:18

suspended today's episode was produced

25:21

by Will Reed Michelle bancha and Rob

25:24

zipco it was edited by Mark George and

25:27

Liz oalen

25:29

contains original music by Dan Powell

25:31

and Marian Lozano and was engineered by

25:34

Chris Wood our theme music is by Jim

25:37

brunberg and Ben Lanser of

25:39

wonderly special thanks to Sharon

25:42

otterman

25:44

[Music]

25:55

[Music]

25:59

that's it for the daily I'm Sabrina

26:01

tavernes see you tomorrow

26:06

[Music]